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ABSTRACT

This brief paper discusses the following: video as the core of 2 courses for Hausa; techniques employing new and old technologies for making these videos tools for total cultural immersion; and problems encountered and not always solved satisfactorily. The videotapes were recorded in Nigeria and cover a wide variety of speech styles and aspects of Hausa life, traditional and modern. Details of what precisely is on the videotapes is explained, including the details of grammar, cultural, and vocabulary components. (KFT)

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TWO LEARNER-BASED COMPUTERIZED COURSES FOR HAUSA

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1. Introduction

In this paper we cover three main things:

1) video as the core of the two courses we have developed for Hausa.
2) techniques employing new and old technologies for making these videos into tools for total cultural immersion.
3) problems we've encountered and have not always solved to our satisfaction.

2. The courses.

Hausa, a language of Nigeria, is taught at a handful of universities in the U.S. Schuh has been involved with the elementary/intermediate course *Hausar Baka* and Leben with the intermediate/advanced one, *Hausar Yau da Kullum*. Both courses are currently being used at UCLA, and we hope that their availability will make it possible to offer Hausa more widely as a regular course as well as outside of a formal curriculum setting.

3. Common features.

Each course is based on several dozen hours of video recorded in Nigeria and edited in the U.S. Scenes were chosen to cover a wide variety of speech styles and aspects of Hausa life, traditional and modern. Doing the taping in Nigeria made it easy to locate colorful, animated settings that satisfied our criteria.

The taping of the videos for both *Hausar Baka* and *Hausar Yau da Kullum* was done by Richard Randell of the Department of Art, Stanford University. Production in Nigeria apart from the videography itself was managed by Abdullahi Bature of the Department of Nigerian Languages, Bayero University, Kano. We are indebted to many collaborators in Nigeria who devised scenes, acted in segments, and served as cultural consultants. Richard Randell supervised the post-production work in the U.S. Both sets of materials were produced with Grants from the Department of Education. The computerized materials for *Hausar Yau da Kullum* were produced with an additional grant, from National Endowment for the Humanities.

4. *Hausar Baka*

Hausar Baka includes five hours of video, with around ninety separate segments, beginning with scenes illustrating basic, simple language and culture and working up to more complex material. Virtually all the segments were natural and unscripted. More than anything else, it was the elementary and intermediate nature of the scenes that kept the vocabulary, grammar, and culture appropriate to those levels. The video segments are

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supplemented by linguistic and cultural exercises on paper. Uses of these materials are described below.

5. *Hausar Yau da Kullum*

Hausar Yau da Kullum is a twenty-four-unit computerized course Each lesson contains a digitized five- to ten-minute video, a running Hausa transcript of the video, an online glossary of the words in the transcript, and a set of exercises on grammar, vocabulary, and culture that make reference to the video for that lesson. Because of the computerized format, the exercises are self-correcting, so students can find out immediately whether they have the right answer.

6. Using the materials

In *Hausar Baka*, every lesson has a grammar component and a cultural component. Schuh, in planning his materials, sometimes allowed the cultural component to drive the grammar and sometimes did the opposite. For example, noticing that the instructions for praying would involve a sequences of steps performed habitually naturally suggested the prayer lesson as the place in which to introduce the continuative aspect. Sometimes the flow went in reverse: realizing the need to introduce the grammar of questions, Schuh and his collaborators devised a skit that asks lots of questions.

From the student's perspective, each class or lesson consists of a video segment (with associated transcript and vocabulary list) and a lesson printout (including pictures captured from the video and associated exercises plus short grammatical sketches. These grammatical sketches are keyed to more detailed grammar discussion in an on-line Hausa reference grammar that Schuh has constructed).

The student prepares for each class by watching the video several times at home. Ideally, the student watches the video at least five times, following the action while consulting the transcript and the vocabulary list. Frankly, we don't believe that any student ever watches any video five times. But since the video was constructed on the principle that one shouldn't need to know Hausa in order to understand the video, even viewing the video once provides concrete instructional benefits: exposure to important aspects of Hausa culture for the beginner, plus exposure to typical sounds, words, and phrases of the language.

In class, the video is run through once or twice, and the Hausa transcript is followed to make sure that the association is made between the sounds on the tape and the utterances in print. The class then turns to the lesson printout, which features snapshots captured from the video. To make these snapshots more interesting visually and more useful pedagogically, and to compensate in part for their being reproduced in black and white, they have been enhanced with captions, dialog balloons, cropping, and highlighting of portions of the picture. The instructor spontaneously asks questions in Hausa, focusing either on the immediate content ("What is this person doing?") or on underlying cultural issues ("Why does X do Y?"). Spontaneity helps to maintain a feeling of liveliness and sets an example for students to follow. Interspersed with these brief interrogations are exercises where the students themselves make up questions and ask them of other

students. At its best, this becomes a game, with students inspired to ask challenging or amusing questions.

Class time thus employs pictures captured from the videos both for grammar practice and for discussion points. This method in principle keeps the class close to what we think is the best aspect of the videos--their authentic Nigerianness. All of the work revolves around one central topic--what the actors did in the video segment.

Grammar exercises are also built on snapshots of the video. One type of grammar exercise consists of questions about what happens in the snapshot, followed by an answer, but there are also many others.

For elementary and at least lower intermediate levels, *Hausar Baka* concentrates on what, to a Hausa, would be mundane, but we regard it as exotic and interesting to an American. Whether this judgment is totally correct is something we return to below.

The organization of *Hausar Yau da Kullum* is different, reflecting the fact that in the U.S. intermediate and advanced Hausa instruction is more likely to take place individually or in very small groups. *Hausar Yau da Kullum* contains twenty-four lessons, each one illustrating a different aspect of Hausa culture, traditional and modern. The core of each lesson is a video segment of between 5 and 10 minutes in length. As you can see in the picture on the left at the bottom of page 3, on the screen with the video is a complete Hausa transcript of the segment. Students can click on vocabulary words to get an English gloss. The course is designed to permit the student to follow the action in the video with a minimum amount of interruption. Once students have followed the video, they can move to the exercises, which dwell on vocabulary, grammar, and cultural points from the lesson. A sample exercise appears on the right at the bottom of page 3. The program responds immediately to tell the student whether an answer is right or wrong, and the student must give the right answer before moving on to another exercise.

This course is designed to be used sitting at a computer by oneself. Of course, the student may have many questions about grammar and culture, and so on, based on a given lesson, and so one of the ideal uses of the course is to provide substantive material for interaction with a Hausa person. As a tool in classes, the hope is that the material on the CD will be followed by the individual students as homework and that class time will be devoted to discussion of issues that arise over the course of the individual reading.

7. Learning grammar as a part of learning culture.

A few decades ago, the notion communicative competence appeared. For most language learning, the ultimate goal—even though it is rarely reached--is to learn to communicate effectively enough to participate in the culture in which the language is spoken. Even though communicative competence is sometimes referred to in connection with resistance to grammar instruction, we tend to view grammar as a pathway toward communicative competence rather than as an obstacle in its way.

For many years, language teaching was characterized by rigid, unsophisticated techniques that ignored key cultural and cognitive aspects of language. Both Schuh and I had a stiff dose of the "informant-drill" technique in an FSI course that sought to prepare us as Peace Corps volunteers in a Hausa-speaking region. The technique was founded on the notion that language was essentially behavior. Accordingly, a native Hausa-speaking instructor would stand before us for five and a half hours a day with FSI textbook in hand and feed us dialogs and drills in Hausa. Meaning was said to get in the way of behavioral habit (presumably because it engaged the mind), and so instructors were forbidden to tell us what they—or we—were saying.

The very fact that two of us from that course (40% of the total enrollment of 5!) went on to devote major parts of our careers to developing new Hausa materials speaks eloquently for its effect on us. We both thought we *could* and *should* do better.

What was wrong with that original course, simply, was that it missed out on many chances to engage us mentally and emotionally. Language learning is part of a program of cultural immersion, with grammar learning assigned a key role. As part of immersion in a culture, we are learn to open our minds to how people act, dress, greet one another, eat, and so on. Understanding cultural differences provides a way of showing respect for the culture of the people whose language we're learning. Not understanding these differences, at worst, is a sign of disrespect. At best, it isolates us from our cultural surroundings. Of course, the same applies to the part of culture that is language. Everyone around us is speaking grammatically, in a broad and narrow sense. If we step in with half-grammatical utterances, how could we expect to be other than isolated from our surroundings?

For this reason, for a course with communicative competence as a goal we can't imagine an organizing principle that did not include grammar as a key component. Stated in a more positive way, grammar is an ideal organizing principle because it is so uncommonly orderly and so absolutely prevalent in communicative situations.

The problem that we face is how to make grammar teaching effective. In developing these courses, we tried to address this problem as creatively as possible:

- by tying grammar learning and cultural learning together into the same exercises
- by using the self-correcting capability of the computer exercises to let the students know whether their answers are right or not.

But to be perfectly frank, we have very little to show. Personally, if I could chose one new bit of knowledge to come away from this conference with, it would be how to use technology to help students learn grammar more effectively.

8. Evaluation and next steps.

Our goal was to create materials so enticing as to motivate students to work harder and get them over the frustrating phases that inevitably accompany language learning. We particularly figured that a constantly changing visual tableau, especially one featuring the colorful and varied aspects of Hausa culture, would be an undying attraction. Based on the experience to date, we're not entirely sure it works this way, though.

These materials are too new and our classes are too small for there to be more than a handful of student responses to base conclusions on. Course evaluations have been highly positive. Proficiency test scores have been good. Yet, since language learning is probably more a function of hours put in than of anything else, a more informative measure of effectiveness would be the amount of time students devoted to language teaching. We must confess that the jury is still out on this measure. Certainly looking at these videos is infinitely more entertaining and rewarding than listening to tapes in the language lab, as we had to do in our student days. Yet we can't escape the suspicion that the videos are greeted, by some students at least, with a feeling akin to the dread we felt on our daily trek to the language lab. It takes an effort to persuade students to look at the videos again and again, as we would ideally like. Perhaps we have over-rated the intrinsic interest of what we have produced. And no doubt anything, however interesting, will become stale after repeated viewings.

Our guess is that the primary flaw is not in the videos themselves but in the ways we are using them, in terms of the Weaver lecture this morning, we are perhaps focusing too much on the tip of the cultural iceberg, dazzling students with exotica at the surface without engaging them sufficiently at a deeper human level.

We strongly support the move to increasingly authentic language learning materials. But we need to recognize better that these come with an upside and a downside. The downside is that such rich, complex materials place special demands on the learner. The upside is the enormous potential for engagement at a very deep human level. But we need to do a better job of probing below the iceberg.

9. Where to find them.

The *Hausar Baka* videos are available from East Bay Media Center (1939 Addison Street, Berkeley, CA 94704-1179). The transcript and vocabulary are available from Russell Schuh (Department of Linguistics, UCLA, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1543). See the *Hausar Baka* website for details (http://www.humnet.ucla.edu/humnet/aflang/hausarbaka).

The *Hausar Yau da Kullum* CD's are available from CSLI Publications, Stanford University, Stanford CA 94305-4115. VHS videotapes in NTSC and PAL format and copies of the original textbook Hausar Yau da Kullum are available from the same source. Please consult http://csli-publications.stanford.edu.